

H. 665
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THE

DUTY OF PENNSYLVANIA CONCERNING SLAVERY.

It is alleged by many that the people of Pennsylvania ought not to concern themselves about the system of slavery as it exists in the United States, because it is a matter belonging exclusively to others—one with which we have nothing to do, and for which we are in no respect accountable.

Let us examine how far this opinion is well founded. If the people of Pennsylvania assist in holding men in slavery, then they have something to do with it. If they make laws either alone or in conjunction with others, for sustaining slavery, then they are answerable for it. There is no difference in point of morality, between doing a wrong ourselves and aiding others to do it. To sanction robbery by law is as unrighteous as actually to commit robbery. The people are the sovereigns in this country; consequently, whatever wrongs are committed by authority of the law, without any general effort to change that law, are virtually committed by the people themselves. If the Pennsylvania laws uphold slavery, then the people of Pennsylvania are, in a moral aspect, themselves slaveholders.

Now what are the facts? We have two laws in Pennsylvania for assisting slaveholders, at the public expense, to hold their victims in bondage. The people of this state are taxed to pay for doing this, and their public officers are employed to do it. One of these laws is the act of Congress made by the representatives of this state in conjunction with those of other states. The other is the act of the Pennsylvania Legislature, made by our representatives, commanding our judges and

magistrates to assist in taking and holding human beings as slaves. The people of Pennsylvania are therefore slaveholders, though not slaveowners. They hold the man as a slave, whom the slaveowner is unable to hold without their assistance.

It has been said that we are not answerable for this wrong, because the Constitution of the United States requires that slaves who escape from their masters shall be returned to them. But the Constitution did not require the Pennsylvania Legislature to pass the law requiring our state officers to give their aid to the slaveholder, in addition to the aid of the officers of the national government. The act of Congress was a sufficient compliance with the Constitution, without the voluntary assistance of the Pennsylvania law makers.

Moreover, the insertion of a command in the Constitution does not make it the more just.—Injustice is always injustice; the insertion of it in a constitution does not change its nature.—The Constitution is but a law—like other laws it is the work of the people, and like them it may be altered by the will of the people.

It may be said that the people of Pennsylvania cannot of themselves alter the Constitution of the Union. True; but they can assist others to do it—they can do their part towards it. They can propose to alter it either through their State Legislature or their members of Congress. This they have not done. If they do it and are not seconded by others, they will then have removed in some measure, the wrong from their own

shoulders. Until they do so, it will rest upon them.

Will it be asserted that it is of no use for Pennsylvania to make the effort because she cannot get a sufficient number of states to join her so as to effect the object? We do not know that until we have made the trial. All reforms must begin somewhere, and must first be supported by a smaller number than is necessary to carry them into full effect. If one state or one individual could offer as a good excuse for the omission to do right, the pretence that other states or other individuals, whom they had not asked, would not assist them, every other state and every other individual could offer the same excuse, and the wrong would continue to be committed by all, and the blame rest nowhere. Every state should do its part whether others do theirs or not. And every individual ought to do his part, whatever others may do. He should strive, by his vote and his petitions and all his moral influence, to remove the wrong which is committed under his authority, as one of the sovereigns of the country; and this he should do not merely once, but continue to do it until the wrong is removed. The people being the supreme power in a republic, they are all guilty of any injustice committed by law, unless, when it is pointed out to them, they use their efforts for its extinction.

Pennsylvania has not only volunteered to support slavery in other states, but also to support it within her own borders. She has made a law authorizing persons to be brought into the state and held there as slaves for the term of six months at a time, giving the aid of her public officers to the holding of them in slavery. This was in no manner required by the Constitution. It is not done in several of our sister states.

The man who has wished to plunder his fellow creature of liberty and the fruits of his labor, has found himself unable to do so to the extent of his desires, without the assistance of others. He has asked Pennsylvania for aid, and Pennsylvania has voluntarily rendered it; consequently if the enslaving of human beings is an outrage, then Pennsylvania is guilty of that outrage.

HOW GREAT IS OUR CRIME?

Having shown our participation, we proceed to

inquire how great is the extent of our crime; or what is the degree of injustice that we inflict on the slaves.

In the first place, we violate grossly and palpably the golden rule, that we should do unto others as we would that they should do unto us. Not one of the citizens through all the length and breadth of our Union, who assists in enslaving men, women and children, would be willing to be a slave, or to see the wife and the children whom he loves reduced to slavery.

Highway robbery is considered a great crime, and the robber is pursued by the law, and by universal detestation. Does he commit a greater wrong than those who enslave or assist in enslaving rational beings? The enormity of a wrong is in proportion to the degree of evil which it inflicts on the sufferer. Measured by this—the only true criterion—to enslave is a greater wrong than to rob. To settle this point, let every one ask himself which he would prefer, to be enslaved or to be robbed of every thing he possesses of earthly goods, which is more than is usually done by the highway robber. The answer must be the same from every one. “I would prefer to be robbed of my all, rather than to be enslaved. The robber only takes my past earnings, but the slaveholder besides doing that cuts me off from the opportunity of future acquisition.”

And the loss of property is but a small part of the evils of slavery. Liberty, more precious than wealth, is taken from the slave. He cannot, like him who has been plundered by the highwayman, choose for himself his future residence, nor his occupation. He is a prisoner for life—he cannot confine himself to that moderate labor of ten or twelve hours a day, which may suit his health or his inclinations; but he may be compelled, by the laws of some of our sister states, which Pennsylvania enforces, to labor “15 hours out of the 24,” and this with scanty food and miserable clothing. Those who would rebel against a trifling tea tax when imposed by England, inflict this thousand-fold greater outrage on others.

Besides this, the slave husband is separated from life from the wife, the parent from the child, brothers and sisters from each other, whenever it suits the selfish interest or inclinations of the

tyrant who would think such wrongs beyond all endurance if inflicted on himself or his family. Those who do this, those who make the laws to sanction it, profess to believe in the precept, "what God hath joined together, let not man put asunder"—while they honor it in profession, they belie it in action.

The slave is prohibited by law from the exercise of those natural faculties for acquiring knowledge and improving his mental condition, which his Creator has bestowed on him. He is required to bury in the earth the talent which providence has entrusted to him. The southern laws, which Pennsylvania enforces by compelling their victims to return under their dominion, forbid any one, even the master of a slave, to teach him to read and write, under the penalty of death. This outrageous law is upheld by a people who talk in favor of universal education. This law, to prevent two millions and a half of people from reading the Bible is sustained by members of Bible societies throughout our land, who are at the same time urging upon the people the importance of sending the scriptures to the colored people of Asia and Africa. Many of these members of Bible societies refuse to petition for the repeal of those outrageous laws, or of the laws of other states by which they are sustained, and they go yearly to the polls and vote for representatives who will not support such repeal.

The slave is deprived of the opportunity of protecting himself and his family against outrage and murder; for the laws will afford him no fair trial, whether he be prosecutor or defendant. The judge and the jury are always selected from among his oppressors, and he is prevented by law, from being a witness himself, or from offering other witnesses of his own complexion to testify against the trespasser or the murderer. Thus, the provisions of the United States Constitution, which declare that the accused shall have a fair trial by an impartial jury, and have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his own favor are substantially violated; and Pennsylvania sends the victim back to submit to this outrage. Of all the cases of murder of slaves by white men, being doubtless several thousands, the murderer has never been executed in a single instance, while slaves are continually put to

death for the most trivial offences. Thus, while we profess to admire our declaration of American Independence, we are ourselves practising in reference to the murderers of slaves, the same offence which was charged in that declaration upon the British King and Parliament, viz: that they had passed laws for protecting the soldiery "by a mock trial from punishment for any murders which they should commit on the inhabitants of these states." The trials of the murderers of slaves are truly mock trials, and they have invariably protected the murderer, or he has afterwards found protection in the pardoning power.

Not only has the slave no protection as to the enforcement of the laws, such as those laws are, but the laws themselves are gross mockeries of all the principles of equal justice. There are seventy-nine offences made punishable by death, when committed by a slave, that are not punished in that manner when committed by a free white man. Thus those who are forbidden to learn to read the law are punished with ten fold greater severity for violating it than those who are thoroughly acquainted with it. In this we find a parallel to the case of the ancient tyrant who wrote his laws on plates, raised so high above the heads of the people that they could not read them, and then punished them for their ignorance. We have a parallel to the old law made by the tyrants of England, but long since abrogated, under which the learned man was excused by the "benefit of clergy" from the punishment of death for the same offence which made the ignorant man liable to it. This outrageous practise is sanctioned and upheld by us, the people of Pennsylvania, in our sending the victims back to be subjected to it, while we almost unanimously abhor the comparatively trifling wrong perpetrated in England, through the distinction made in the game laws between the noblemen and the commoner, as to the privilege of hunting.

Our forefathers rebelled against Great Britain because she would not allow them to choose their own rulers. We deprive the slaves of all voice in choosing their rulers or their masters. They rebelled because England put a slight tax upon their tea. We deprive the slaves in general of the use of tea altogether. For every dollar that England took from us without our consent, we

take a thousand from the slaves. The slaves have a thousand times greater cause to seek freedom from our dominion than we had from that of Great Britain. Most truly did Thomas Jefferson declare that the wrongs which we inflict upon the colored race were more grievous in a single hour, than whole ages of those which our ancestors rose in arms to resist.

THE OBJECTIONS MADE AGAINST ABOLITION CONSIDERED.

It is said that we ought to continue in force our laws made for enslaving human beings, or for keeping them in a state of slavery, because we have contracted, or rather our ancestors contracted, in the Constitution, that we should do so. We have already referred to this objection, and intimated that a part of the contract was, that we should have the right to alter that Constitution. But suppose it were otherwise. Still, neither our ancestors, nor even ourselves, could bind us by a contract requiring us to commit injustice. No man can bind himself or his offspring, by contract, to commit a murder, a theft, or any other palpable wrong against any unoffending person. If we have received a compensation for an unjust promise to injure others, we may be morally bound to return that compensation: but whether we return it or not, we have no right to perform our unrighteous promise. There is not a slaveholder in all the Union who can believe, for a moment, that a man who has entered into a contract to kill him, or to enslave him, is morally bound to comply with that contract, or that he has even any right to comply with it.

It is said that we have received benefits from the slaveholders in our revolutionary war, and in our commercial intercourse, that we ought to repay. If this were true, we would have no right to pay them, except with our own money or services:—no right to pay with the earnings or the liberties of others. There, is, however, no foundation for the assertion that the north has derived greater advantages from the south, than the south from the north. If the majority think otherwise, let them pay honestly,—not dishonestly, by committing a greater wrong than the refusal to pay a just debt.

It is further asserted, that if we will not con-

tinue to assist in slaveholding, then the slaveholders will secede from the Union, and that such secession will be injurious to our interests. If this were true, it should furnish no inducement to an honest people to commit acts of oppression. It is the duty of every man to forfeit the friendship and the trade of his father, his brother, or his neighbor, rather than to aid in robbery, theft, or the still greater wrong of slaveholding, for the sake of retaining such trade or friendship. If all the States should solemnly declare that they would dissolve their Union with Pennsylvania, unless Pennsylvania would surrender one-third of her citizens to be held as slaves, it would be the duty of Pennsylvania, as well as her inclination, to let them secede, rather than yield to their unjust demand. The slaveholders of every slaveholding State would sooner dissolve all political unions than submit to the enslavement of themselves or their children. It is the duty of Pennsylvania and of the south, to do to others as they would that others should do to them. It is their duty to let other States secede from the Union, much as they may regret it, if the only means of preventing it is to assist in inflicting a wrong upon others, which they would not undergo themselves for the sake of any political union that ever existed.

It is not probable, however, that the south will secede for so bad a reason. We may trust something to their sense of justice, and something to a regard to their own interests. They would gain nothing by secession. Their hold on their slaves would be rendered still more insecure by disunion, as was recently declared on the floor of Congress by Mr. Underwood, of Kentucky. But a small proportion of the people of the south are slaveholders; and very many of the slaveholders themselves desire to see an end put to slavery. Hence, we presume, that as soon as the north is resolved to rid itself of its share of the guilt, the south will be ready to agree upon some great and wise measure of general emancipation. The slaveholding spirit is kept up in the south by the encouragement which it now receives in the north. To bring the north to just views and just action, is the first great step towards the entire extinction of slavery throughout our country.

Some object to the language and the plans of

modern abolitionists, and say that they will for that reason do nothing to aid in abolition. This is a paltry and miserable excuse. If they do not like the language or the schemes of certain abolitionists, they should put their own hands to the work, and use such language and adopt such plans as they deem more becoming and more useful. They cannot justify their participation in slaveholding, by alleging that some 'persons propose to get rid of their own participation by an injudicious method.

It is said, by some, that gradual emancipation is 'better than immediate, and that the slaves ought to be prepared for liberty by education. If they think so, they should labor and petition for gradual emancipation. They should ask Congress and the State Legislature to aid in returning no slaves to any State where both education and gradual emancipation are not encouraged by the laws, instead of returning them, as they now do, to places where both education and gradual emancipation are prohibited. When will they effect gradual emancipation by their present policy? Under this cry of gradualism, the slaves have gradually but rapidly increased, from half a million to nearly two millions and a half.

It is not a fact, however, that gradual emancipation is better than immediate. We ought instantly to grant to all men the enjoyment of their inalienable rights. We can in no case justly continue to withhold them for a single moment. There is no instance on record in which evil consequences have ever resulted from the granting of liberty to the oppressed by the voluntary act of their former tyrants. The pretence that slaves would cut their former masters' throats, because they had given them their freedom, is not only grossly absurd in itself, but it has been disproved by the experience of England, a large portion of Europe, where the mass of the people were once slaves, as well as by the more recent experiment in the West Indies. It is more than seven years since all the slaves were emancipated in a single day in Antigua and Bermuda, yet no former master has to this day been there killed by an emancipated slave; but where slavery still exists, the master as well as the slave frequently loses his life in consequence of the irritation arising out of their relations to each other.

The allegation that emancipated slaves will be unable to take care of themselves, is no better than the others. How preposterous to suppose, that those who have given half their income to the support of others, cannot live when they have it all to themselves. How unreasonable, to suppose that those who have been driven to work for others by the whip, cannot be induced to work for themselves by the necessity of a subsistence, and the prospect of bettering their condition. The excuse that the people at large are incapable of taking care of themselves, has always been offered by tyrants of every class and grade, and it has always been proved false when the experiment has been tried. Large numbers out of the eight hundred thousand slaves recently emancipated in the British West Indies, have already acquired some real estate: beside supporting themselves, they contribute to anti-slavery societies for aiding the emancipation of their brethren in other lands. They are as industrious and as free from crime as the free population of the whole world will average. They do not commit one murder to ten which the slaveholders of the south commit in an equal extent of population. Their habits of industry are such, that there being an excess of land, the former masters in each island endeavor to induce the emancipated slaves to migrate to their own island from others, or to retain them at home when disposed to go abroad; and they send vessels to the United States to invite the emancipated slaves of this country to migrate to Jamaica, Trinidad, or Guiana, where they are preferred to any other class of laboring population.

Another pretence is, that a slave is happier than a freeman. Those who say so have never proved the sincerity of their belief by offering to become slaves themselves, or to make slaves of their posterity. They have no right to judge for others, and under the pretence of making them happy, force them to submit to a condition which is the very last that they would choose for themselves. If true happiness is found only in slavery, it is unfair that the colored people should be permitted to monopolize it. The slaveholders should be allowed to take their turn of happiness, by becoming slaves in place of those whom they have heretofore held in that condition.

It is sometimes asserted that the slaves in general do not desire to be free—that they would not take liberty if offered to them. If this be true, their masters cannot reasonably complain if we decline to assist in compelling people to act according to their own preference. Let every slave have his free choice; then we will cease to complain of the laws on the subject. Those who make this allegation are generally the most eager to make or continue in force our laws for compelling slaves to do that which they assert they will do of their own accord.

Some pretend that slavery is no great evil to the slaves, because it is the interest of the masters to use them kindly. If so, it is their interest to set them free, for nothing short of this is kind usage. It is the true interest of all men to be just, benevolent, and merciful. But experience proves that they will not all pursue their true interests. We do not trust a parent to act as he pleases toward his child, or a master toward his apprentice, but make laws to compel them to act justly. The slave is without this protection. We dare not trust kings and nobles to govern us, for we know, from the experience of other nations, that they would oppress us. We will not elect our Presidents, Governors, or Legislators for life, but choose them by frequent elections, to prevent them from becoming tyrants. How absurd it is, then, to pretend that a master for life, never chosen at all by the slave, will not often oppress him. We have the proofs, positive and irresistible, of oppression, in the laws to which we have referred, in the practice of robbing the slave of his earnings, and in thousands of instances of extreme personal cruelty. The people of Pennsylvania would rebel against the Union rather than endure the condition of the slaves for a single month; the slaveholders would rebel rather than submit to that condition for a single week.

It is urged, that if slavery were abolished the emancipated slaves would migrate to the north, and interfere with the employment of our own people. If they should so migrate, it would do us no more injury than the migration of foreigners to this country, and that is none at all. We have so great an abundance of land, that our country can support many times its present popu-

lation, and all be as fully employed as at present. There is no more want of employment now than there was sixty years ago, when our population was not one-fifth part of its present number. But it is not the fact that the abolition of slavery would cause an increase of colored population in the northern States. The effect would be directly the reverse. It is the existence of slavery, and of the cruel laws connected with it at the south, which now causes the migration of the colored people to the north. So long as these causes exist, the effect will continue. But when slavery shall be abolished, the current of migration will turn the other way. The colored people are attached to the south by birth, and by the greater favorableness of the southern climate to their constitutions. There is more untilled land to occupy them at the south than at the north; and the planters assert that the white man cannot well endure labor in the sun, in the climate of Georgia, Louisiana, &c. Consequently, those planters will make liberal offers for colored laborers from the north, so soon as the present fear of their stirring up insurrection shall cease; and this will cease so soon as slavery ceases. None of the colored people have migrated to the United States from the West Indies and Guiana since slavery was abolished there; but many have gone from here to those countries, in vessels sent by the planters on purpose to carry them. The same result will take place in our southern States, when the same state of things shall be established.

Some assail the abolitionists in reference to the amalgamation of the two races. As this question is entirely independent of the abolition of slavery, and as the intermixture of the colors is not increased by emancipation, it is entirely unnecessary here to discuss the question.

Others urge the importance of colonization. It is equally unnecessary to discuss this question, inasmuch as the abolition of slavery is all-important, whether colonization takes place or not. If colonization be wrong, it should not stand in the way of emancipation; and if it be right, there is more prospect of the voluntary emigration of colored people, when they are free, than of their masters sending them away while in slavery. There have not been as many slaves sent to Af-

na, in the twenty-six years that the Colonization Society has existed, as are born in a single week; and not one-third as many as the number of free colored people who have voluntarily gone to the West Indies and Guiana.

The friendliness of some of the noblemen and aristocrats of Europe to the emancipation of slaves, is offered as a reason why we should not encourage it. It would be quite as rational to offer the opposition of southern slaveholders to monarchy and nobility, as a reason why the English people should not effect any reform in their government. Tyrants of every class are generally able to see, and willing to condemn, every species of tyranny except that which they practise themselves. The European aristocracy condemn the tyranny of American slaveholders, and American slaveholders that of the European aristocracy. Both are right in condemning each other. Let us hope that they may ever continue thus to aid, in part, the friends of universal liberty and of equal and exact justice. If we are bound to support every thing which the English nobility condemn, then we must become the advocates of theft, robbery, murder, and Paganism, as well as of slavery. As reasonable men, we should try every thing on its own merits, and rejoice in all the assistance to the right that we can obtain; remembering, that as there are, perhaps, no men perfectly wise and virtuous, there are few or none perfectly destitute of a disposition to perform some good works.

It is proper to add, that the support of emancipation in England and Ireland proceeded principally from the most liberal classes, and the opposition principally from the most anti-republican. If we remove slavery, we remove the greatest pretext of the oppressors of other lands for declaiming against the republican institutions of our country, and for keeping their own people under the dominion of tyranny.

Our southern brethren, and many in the north, object that we have no right to *interfere* with the internal concerns of the south. Suppose we admit it. Then it follows, as an absolute certainty, that we have no right to keep up our present National and State laws in the north which do thus *interfere*, and compel the majority of the inhabitants of Carolina, Louisiana, and Mississippi, to submit

to the most cruel oppression from the minority. We are not only guilty of *interference*, but of *interfering* in favor of the oppressor, instead of in favor of the oppressed, as was done by Lafayette, for which this country has rendered him both honors and rewards. Every time that we take up a man and send him into slavery, we do most outrageously interfere with his private affairs: we most cruelly prevent him from emigrating to Canada, or the West Indies, where he may be going in that "pursuit of happiness" which is his inalienable right.

We have, however, the undoubted right to interfere by argument and persuasion. The southern slaveholders themselves interfere in the concerns of Greece, Poland, Texas, and Mexico. They send the Bible and missionaries to heathen lands to convert them; and they propose to Christianize and civilize Africa. Have we not as much right to attempt to bring the south to practical Christianity and civilization, by the offering of good advice and sound argument?

The difference of complexion is sometimes offered as an excuse for slaveholding. This excuse is no better than that of divine right for kings; that of superior blood for nobility; that of greater wealth or learning for oppression; that of greater strength or better weapons for robbery; that of superior cunning for fraud and forgery; or that of a difference of religious belief for persecution and bloodshed. It would serve as well to justify the black man in enslaving the white one. Tyrants often offer such excuses, but they never admit their validity when applied against themselves. They can, therefore, never justly apply them against others.

But it is needless to pursue further the objections that are urged against abolition. Those we have examined are the principal and most prominent ones; all others that might be adduced, would be found, on examination, to be equally groundless.

The position, then, which abolitionists take, and the ground which we have attempted to defend in this article is this; *that it is the duty of Pennsylvania and of the Union, at all hazards, and in all possible events, to cease from holding men as slaves, and from assisting others to hold men in slavery.*

Let this doctrine be carried out, and incalculable advantages will accrue to the whole country. To the south will accrue an improvement in morals, in education, in enterprise, in peace, in order, in freedom from the fear of insurrection and bloodshed, in skill in the arts, and in the value of the soil. To the north, peace of conscience, the exercise of constitutional rights, now taken away in part by slavery, such as freedom of speech, freedom of the press, right of locomotion, right of petition, and deliverance from the many burdens and the deep disgrace which slavery heaps upon us in common with the whole country.

We would, therefore, in conclusion, urge upon every one to exert all the influence with which he is endowed by his Maker, or the constitution and laws of his country, to aid in the effort for the overthrow of slavery. Send in your petitions to Congress and to the State Legislatures, asking for the abolition of slavery in the District

of Columbia; and for the repeal of all such laws as require us to aid in the support of slavery. Let every voter who goes to the polls be careful to cast his vote only for such men as he is sure will exert the power of their office, so far as it extends, in favor of abolition. Let the Democrat adhere to his political principles if he will, and the Whig adhere to his, but let neither give his suffrage to any man, whether he be candidate for President, Governor, or representative, who will not give assurances to the public that he will exert his constitutional power and influence in favor of the slave's emancipation. By such means as these the abolitionists hope to effect their object; means which every man has not only a right, but, as a good citizen, and a good man, he is *bound* to employ. Let the people of Pennsylvania, then, unite with the good and the free of other States in the use of these means, and the work of freeing our country from the evils and curse of slavery will soon be accomplished.